

THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW

MAY 22, 1955

Typically Russian

NINE SOVIET PORTRAITS. By Raymond A. Bauer with Edward Wasiolek. Illustrated. 190 pp. New York: John Wiley & Sons and the Technology Press of Massachusetts Institute of Technology. \$3.95.

By PHILIP E. MOSELEY

HOW do Soviet engineers and doctors, teachers and peasants, live their everyday lives? Sharing the same basic human needs and hopes with people everywhere, do they have the same kind of lives as they would in another kind of society, or has the impact of Soviet totalitarianism molded them to an entirely different pattern? How does human nature adjust itself to the all-embracing claims of a system that strives both to control and reshape all lives within the reach of its despotic authority?

"Nine Soviet Portraits" provides partial and valuable answers to these questions. In it "typical" members of Soviet society are presented in half-documentary, half-fictional form. The book is an ingenious and successful application of the insights of social psychology to the presentation of real life situations in Soviet society. Raw material used in this experiment was assembled through the Harvard Refugee Interview Project, conducted in Germany and New York in 1950 and 1951, with the farsighted support of the United States Air Force. From these records Raymond A. Bauer of the Harvard Russian Research Center has assembled typical or central experiences, supplementing them with material drawn from Soviet newspapers and novels.

A chapter on "The Students" expresses vividly the pressures of the Communist party for active loyalty to its changing and often unpredictable demands. Some students learn readily how to satisfy the demands of the regime while thereby promoting their careers. Others are caught between their natural ambition for a career and an inner need to preserve some refuge of personal and intellectual integrity.

The role of the Soviet doctor, today predominantly a woman's role, is stated simply and poignantly. The administration frequently sets fixed limits on the number of sick leaves that may be granted; the doctor's conscience is tormented by being unable to do her duty to her patients. Again, "The Housewife" reports in detail the hardships of simultaneously running a household, holding a job and bringing up children, under Soviet conditions.

THE problem of continued low productivity in Soviet farming is told better by the stories of "The Woman Collective Farmer" and "The Tractor Driver" than by many pages of Soviet-

Mr. Moseley is director of the Russian Institute at Columbia.

IN THE MOSCOW MIRROR



"And here, Comrade Inspector, is the account of our work. . ."
"Splendid. I will take due note of its contents."



The Fully Equipped Author.
"What are you doing?"
"Observing life."

"Krokodil" cartoons in "Nine Soviet Portraits."

style statistics. "The Secret Police Agent" may seem melodramatic; in fact, it reproduces a common and pervasive Soviet pattern by which voluntary networks of informers are recruited and "professionals" are selected and trained for their grim function.

HERE, once again, a "typical" student is used as a model recruit for the NKVD. At first, Sergei "carefully avoided telling anything incriminating, repeating only a few of the mildest of political anecdotes such as could be told almost openly. The resident agent to whom he reported said that he was sure Sergei could discover more than this, and warned him that they would expect better results in the future. Sergei promised to do better. . . . Suddenly, almost without knowing how, he had denounced his family and become one of the network of informers. What sort of change had taken place in him? Really none, he told himself. He was only doing what was necessary

and inevitable. He still believed his father to be the innocent victim of someone's mistake. 'But what can a young boy do?' he would repeat in self-defense. 'How else can I have a career? It is a necessary compromise. I will get out of this situation as soon as I can.' But there was no escaping."

"The Party Secretary" shows a key instrument of the regime at work. This story is successful in showing the blending of the official ideal and the human aspirations operating beneath the party slogans. "The Writer" oversimplifies the very real clash between the changing "social command" of the party and the striving of the creative novelist to "say his own word." "The Factory Director" is one of the best of the portraits.

"Nine Soviet Portraits" gives a direct insight into the impact of Soviet indoctrination and controls on the lives of typical Soviet people. It cuts through the fog of "pro" and "anti" propaganda to give a picture of lives "as they are lived" under the Soviet system.